



**County of Peoria - Office of County Clerk
JoAnn Thomas**

Testimony of

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Election Assistance Commission**

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Good Morning. Thank you, Mr. Chairmen and commissioners, for inviting me to speak with you today. Poll Worker recruitment, training, retention and the Help America Vote College Poll Worker Grant are important topics. First, I would like to commend you for your focus on this issue as Election Officials throughout the country are dealing with dramatic changes in elections and quality poll workers are a vital part of any successful election. I would like to address Peoria County's experience with this program and provide possible insights and recommendations for future College Poll Worker programs.

My name is Thomas Bride and I have been the Election Administrator in the Office of the County Clerk in the Peoria County, Illinois since June of 2005. Peoria County is divided into two election jurisdictions with the County Clerk administering elections throughout the County and the City of Peoria Board of Elections Commissioners managing the elections within the city limits of Peoria. Peoria County has around 50,000 registered voters, 53 precincts and 45 polling locations. During the November 2004 General Election Peoria County was leasing the Diebold Accuvote optical scan system which provided error detection and second chance voting. In response to the Help America Vote Act, the County purchased a new voting system in 2006. Peoria County is one of only three election jurisdictions in the State of Illinois using an all Direct Recording Electronic voting system, the Hart InterCivic eSlate, allowing all voters in the county to vote on the same system and limiting the training of election judges to one voting system. In the November 2006 General Election the County will train and employ at least 265 election judges¹ on Election Day and approximately 100 Election judges during the seventeen day early voting period.

Brief Summary

Illinois Central College, working with JoAnn Thomas, the Peoria County Clerk, received a Help America Vote College Poll Worker grant of \$12,000 with the goal of placing approximately fifty students in specific polling sites on the November 2, 2004 General Election. The program attracted fifty students who were trained, and forty-eight that actually worked on Election Day. The recruitment of students was primarily through direct contact and working with leadership based students groups at the college. Peoria County used seventeen student poll workers in various precincts and in the County Clerk's office. Some of the students who were not registered to vote in Peoria County, but were not employed as poll workers in their Election Jurisdiction, worked in the County Clerk's Office troubleshooting calls and providing technical support for election judges in the precincts. The students, Marty Pump, Principal Investigator, from Illinois Central College, and the County Clerk agreed that the collaboration was a great success.

¹ Poll workers are referred to as election judges in the State of Illinois

Results of Help America Vote College Program in Peoria County

Surveys of the students were preformed both prior to and following the November 2004 election. The students rated themselves on knowledge of the election process at 2.96 out of 5 before the election and 4.02 out of 5 after the election. This shows the students work experience was also a great learning experience. The scores on the survey indicate the overall experience of the students was very high and their perception of the opportunity to work with the other, and mostly older, election judges was also very high. The feedback from the traditional election judges in the County was extremely positive with a limited number of complaints. One of the most frequent comments was the students' acceptance and comfort level with an increased use of technology in election voting systems. Traditional election judges were also impressed by the student's energy level at the end of a thirteen hour day--Illinois polls are open from 6am-7pm. The 2004 General Election with a 68% voter turnout led to a much higher than normal number of calls to the office from the precincts and from voters requesting information on where and how to vote. The students provided a workforce to handle the number of calls that would have most likely overwhelmed the County's full and part-time election staff. The students provided a very capable, flexible and mobile workforce that was a great supplement to the traditional election judges employed by the County. The student election judges were used at various precincts, the County Clerk's office, and in tabulation sub-stations located throughout the County. This helped as traditional election judges sometimes disliked working outside their home precinct. In addition, anxiety toward new technology made the value of utilizing this particular workforce eminent. Unfortunately, the retention of these student election judges has been limited since the students were paid by grant funds through Illinois Central College. No mechanism has been established for retention of the student judges or for the continuation of the program beyond the initial grant.

Future Strategies

I. Planning

Illinois Central College and the Peoria County Clerk became aware of this grant just a few days before the deadline for submittal. The timing of the grant did not affect the recruitment of student election judges but did create unintended consequences for the College and the County of Peoria. This short notice limited the College's ability to incorporate the experience into curriculum as well as limited the learning experience to outside the classroom and to students directly involved in the program. Issues also arose in training students and placement on Election Day. The program included fifty students from several election jurisdictions using different voting systems which complicated the training and limited the ability to train all of the students at one time. This also put restrictions on the timely notification of all the election jurisdictions involved in the program.

Future programs need increased notification to the colleges and election jurisdictions. This will simplify training issues and allow more jurisdictions to utilize students in this program.

One of the most significant, if not the most significant, characteristics to a successful program is a good working relationship between the principals involved at both the college and election jurisdiction. There must also be a commitment to the program from both parties. This commitment can be the difference between a successful program and adding a few bodies on Election Day. Without the proper commitment, the opportunity for an excellent learning experience is lost.

II. Importance of Training

The election jurisdiction must be willing to incorporate student election judges into their current election judge training and workforce. This raises thoughtful concerns to be addressed during training. Student judges need to be trained to respect older election judges as well as the depth of knowledge and commitment they have for the election process. Older judges need to understand students can bring energy and a different set of skills to the precinct workforce. In the November 2004 Election these issues were addressed in training attended by both student and traditional election judges.

The adoption of new voting systems throughout the country beginning in 2006 has created a great opportunity to use student election judges. Student election judges have technical skills different from traditional election judges whom are most frequently used in election jurisdictions. Peoria County switched from punch card voting equipment to an optical scan system in 2001. The County has since changed to an all Direct Recording Electronic voting system to meet the requirements set forth by the Help America Vote Act and to allow all voters the ability to vote on the same equipment. While this technology has created a training challenge, student election judges with increased technical skills proved very beneficial.

Training of election judges is an important aspect of a successful election. It is essential for election judges. Peoria County has developed training that uses small groups of 25 as well as interactive training with real life situations and actual voting equipment. This creates interaction between student and traditional election judges. These training sessions have traditionally lasted three to four hours covering the basics for Election Day as well as changes in election law and equipment. For example, when provisional voting was introduced the topic was covered in depth. Recently, the introduction of a new voting system allowed training to be completely dedicated to the operation of this new equipment. Extra classes for new election judges were also held. While this may seem intense and cumbersome for some jurisdictions, Peoria County has found the training worthwhile and necessary. The planning and operational activities are developed by the election authority, but on Election Day the judges are in control of the precinct and make many of the important decisions based on their training.

III. Flexibility

An election jurisdiction must be flexible in how it trains and uses student judges. Recruitment can and should be coordinated with the college. Training should be flexible enough to allow students with busy and varied schedules to attend. In return for flexibility from the election jurisdiction, they will be awarded with a pool of mobile and technologically savvy election judges. Student election judges can be used in Election Day precincts, early voting locations, as technical troubleshooters moving throughout the election jurisdiction, or employed as help for in-house call centers.

Benefits

During the Election

The benefits of the Help America Vote College Poll Worker program during an election, both on Election Day as in November 2004 and in early voting scenarios such as those available in Illinois and other states in 2006, are tremendous. The problem with poll worker recruitment for election officials throughout the country is ongoing and the aging of traditional poll workers calls for new and more creative approaches to recruitment. In the State of Illinois, election jurisdictions are allowed to use high school students who meet certain criteria as poll workers even if the students are too young to register to vote. This is a small pool of potential election judges and adding college students greatly increases the numbers of young poll workers. An indirect benefit can be observed by the interaction between the traditional poll workers and the student poll workers. This social value is beyond the immediate need of managing an election. With the wholesale changes in voting equipment brought about by the Help America Vote Act, a need for diverse poll workers has been created. The student poll worker program is an obvious and proven successful solution to this problem.

Post Election and Long Term

Creating an appreciation of the democratic process and participating in the election are the greatest long term benefits of the student poll worker program. Over 90% of students involved in this program registered and voted and over 80% encouraged others to vote. Overwhelmingly students stated they were very likely to work in future elections. These results are long term and have the potential to reach beyond the students involved into what can be considered their largely apathetic peer demographic. Finally, the interaction between student poll workers and traditional poll workers is a benefit measured in countless ways.

I would once again like to thank you for the opportunity to address the Commission and for your interest in this timely and important topic.

Respectfully submitted,
Thomas Bride
Peoria County Election Administrator